

Sermon / 19 April 2025 / John18:1-19:42 / It's All About the Cross (Good Friday 2025)

Today is Good Friday. Today is the day we listen to and think about Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Today is the day Jesus dies. It's a day of sorrow and grief.

But we've read the book. We know how the story ends. It's the basis of our faith – our religion.

As if often the case in our lives, we might want to skip the difficult part – the parts that are hard to understand, hard to take – the parts that make us squirm or feel uncomfortable. Now.... we can more easily endure the horrors of today when we know the outcome. But still, Good Friday is rough to stomach. Jesus dies for us.

But....it will be OK. We know what happens next.

So then what are we doing here? Why do we gather on this tragic day that we call Good Friday?

It's tradition. It's required. It's a necessary part of the process of salvation?
We've always done it?

It's definitely more than listening to the crucifixion story each year. It's more than remembering what Jesus went through for our sake.

There is more to today than simply making a stop on the road to the resurrection.

What is it? What are we doing?

It's all about the cross. To take it one step further, it's all about the veneration of the cross.

Near the end of this evening's liturgy, Fr. Christopher will carry the large, heavy, wooden cross forward and place it front and center. We always see that large cross hanging above the altar. But today, Good Friday, we're going to experience the cross up close and personal.

Because it's all about the cross.

We will all be invited to come forward for the veneration of the cross. We'll venerate the cross

Even if you've been here a long time and have participated in this service of Veneration of the Cross before or come from another tradition that venerates the cross, you may wonder what it exactly means. Why do we do it? And if you've never even heard of the veneration of the cross, you'll certainly wonder what on earth people are doing?

It's all about the cross.

Veneration of the cross, often taking place on Good Friday, is **a practice of honoring the cross of Christ, not as an object in itself, but as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice and the instrument of our salvation.** It can involve acts of reverence like kneeling, bowing, touching, and even kissing the cross. Some people simply stand or kneel in front of the cross and gaze at it in honor and respect. During their time with the cross, people might offer prayers of wonder, awe, and thanksgiving.

It's all about the cross.

This practice of venerating the cross is a way to reflect on the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection and to draw strength from his sacrifice.

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...draw strength.

What if we approach Good Friday not as something difficult to endure, but rather as a way to draw strength for the work God has given us to do. We can venerate the cross and draw strength from it – knowing that Jesus has cleared the way for us to do what we are called to do.

Jesus has taken away our sins. Jesus has shown us that God's love, acceptance, grace, and forgiveness are freely given to us – to everyone. Let's come forward to the cross and get charged up for taking that message out to the world.

Most of you have probably never been downstairs to the basement where youth formation classes are held on Sunday mornings. That's the way our youth like it. It's their domain. No adults allowed.

In the hallway is a Jesus Rocket. Yes. A Jesus Rocket – built from used car seats, an old computer keyboard, and steel wall studs. It's kind of janky and left over from the days when St. Mark's took a hard evangelical turn. The kids absolutely love it.

And across the hall from the Jesus Rocket is a cross made out of 2x4's, painted gold, and screwed to the wall. From the control center of the Jesus Rocket, you look out the windshield and see that cross. Painted beside that gold, 2x4 cross are the words....

“The Cross of Christ – Your Power Source

It certainly looks cheesy and, at first, sounds a little silly and simplistic. But it's exactly what I'm talking about this evening. We venerate the cross of Christ to draw strength from it. The cross is, indeed, our power source.

It's all about the cross.

This evening, we are invited to come forward and spend some time with the cross to draw strength from what it stands for – strength we can use.....strength we WILL use to do the work Jesus calls us to do.

We need strength to spread the message through our words and actions that God's love, acceptance, grace, and forgiveness are freely given to us and to absolutely everyone we meet.

We need strength to feed those who do not have enough to eat.

We need strength to work towards solving the systemic problems of poverty, mental illness, and addiction that can lead to homelessness or incarceration.

We'll draw strength for the work of fighting climate change which threatens to destroy the good earth God has given us.

Strength to live our lives as our authentic selves as God intended us to be. Strength to stand up for and with our friends and siblings who are made to feel less than for doing that.

Strength to stand up against misinformation, lies, and hateful actions those in authority are dispensing that work against the very commands Jesus gave us to welcome the stranger and love our neighbor as ourselves.

It's all about the strength we get from the cross.

The origins of venerating the cross date back to 335. During the dedication of the Constantinian Basilicas, Empress Helena presented what were believed to be splinters from the actual cross on which Jesus was crucified. These tiny pieces of wood were celebrated and prayed over.

This evening, when we have the opportunity to venerate the cross, let us each figuratively take a part of the cross with us for strength and courage to face the tasks ahead of us.

Or better yet! In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his friends that if they want to be his followers, they must get rid of their own selfish ways and pick up their cross and join him. Not just splinters, but an entire cross!

It's all about the cross, today. It's all about the cross every. Single. Day.

We are all invited to venerate the cross this evening. Sitting in your seat. Coming forward to touch the cross or maybe kneel in front of the cross. A splinter. A whole cross. Take what you need. Take what you can.

Today is a rough day in the Christian calendar. There are many dark days ahead for those of us who follow the teachings of Jesus.

We will therefore venerate the cross every time and every place we spread the true gospel message that God's love, acceptance, grace, and forgiveness are freely given to everyone.

It is all about the cross, my friends. It's all about the cross.

